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# An Evaluation of School Experience Courses: The Development of Observation and Reflection Competences of Prospective Teachers

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## Abstract

Developing observation and reflection competences within school experience process is crucial in order to gain teaching profession. In fact, in merging practical and theoretical knowledge through teaching practice requires in-depth observation and reflection competences. Teaching practicum and school experience courses have aims to develop field knowledge, plan and preparation, teaching methods and techniques, communication, classroom management, evaluation, professionalism by developing observation and reflection competences. Significantly, portfolio is a kind of progress tool to make prospective teachers to report on teaching practicum. In this respect, this study aims to evaluate the development of observation and reflection competences of prospective teachers on school experience courses. The qualitative research design was employed in this study that case study approach was implemented within an inductive process. Self-reports of 65 prospective teachers helped to gather qualitative data that were analyzed based on thematic analysis. This research process yielded how observation and reflection, self-determination competences are significant and are developed through teaching practicum.

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*Keywords: competence, quality in teaching, observation, reflection, teaching practicum*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Reflection is a key term for the roots of teacher education programs that is gained from school experiences courses. It becomes a bridge to merge cognitive, procedure domains. It is a key activity for teacher development (Zhu, 2011). In this respect, the study of Van Manen (1991) states the levels of

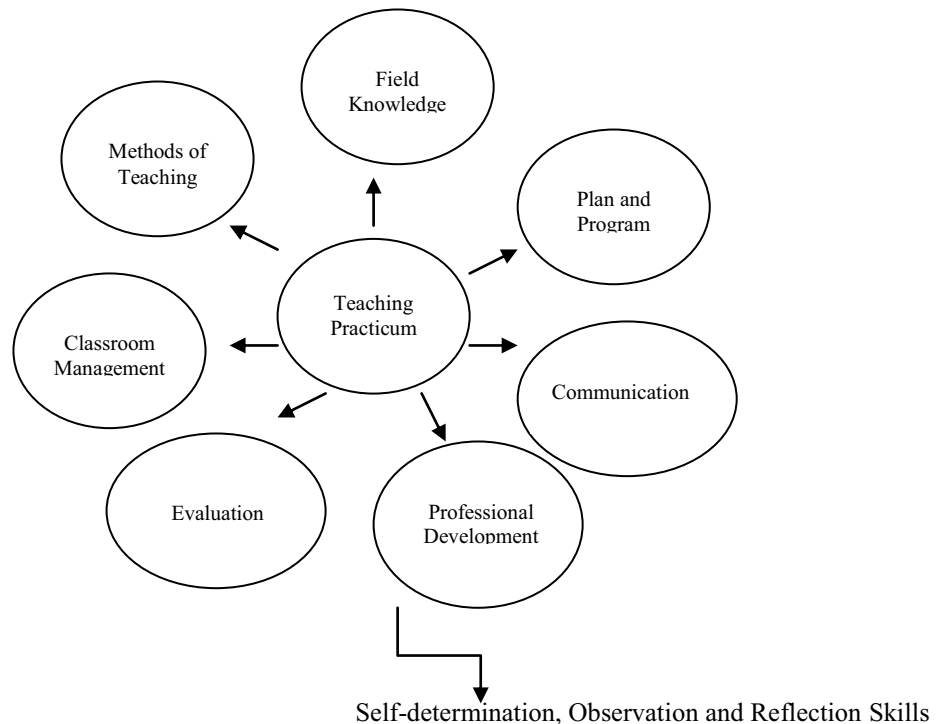
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reflection that are technical rationality, practical action, critical reflection, reflection on reflection. Therefore, school experiences courses are modes of active learning within the practical process. It is important to be in an action-based approach for the development of teaching skills in higher education based on peer observation and collaborative reflection (Martin, Double, 1998).

As teacher reflection means examining ‘one’s own interpretations, looking at one’s own perspectives from another perspective, and turning a self-critical eye onto one’s own authority as interpreter and author’s (Husu, Toom, Patrikainen, 2008), it is crucial stressing the importance of reflective practice through school experience courses for establishing deepen reflection for the deconstruction of knowledge.

Learning through reflection and observation are the rationale stances of school experience process in constructing knowledge. Teaching practicum and school experiences are opportunities for professional knowledge based on reflective practice. In this respect, reflection supports professional practice that continuing learning through practices makes the development of observation and reflection skills (Samuels, Betts 2007).

This study aims to reveal the role of synergy among the components of teaching practicum for the development of self-determination, observation and reflection skills throughout the school experience courses. As the teaching practicum covers field knowledge, plan and program, methods of teaching, communication, classroom management, evaluation and professional development activities; self-determination, observation, reflection skills need to be developed for transferring these skills to the professional life. The following figure summarized the synergy of teaching practicum components and targeted transferrable skills for the work life.



*Figure1. Components of Teaching Practicum*

Teaching practicum is significant process for the prospective teachers to gain basic skills to transfer into the work place. Teaching profession is the harmony of field knowledge, plan and program, methods of teaching, communication, classroom management, evaluation and professional development activities which those foster self-determination, observation and reflection skills within knowledge management (Kuter, Gazi A., Aksal A., 2012). In this respect, this study aims to evaluate the perceptions of prospective teachers on the experience of teaching practicum. Regarding the aim of the research, the following research questions need to be answered:

- How do prospective teachers perceive teaching practicum components?
- To what extend, prospective teachers develop self-determination, observation and reflection skills?

## **2. METHOD**

### **2.1 Research Design**

The study is grounded on the nature of qualitative research. The socially constructed meaning, experiences and perceptions are crucial elements to understand, explain the nature of the problem. As Creswell (2009) points out that qualitative research design is interpretive and inductive process to understand the meanings, perceptions and human experiences; this study focuses on inductive process with evaluating the perceptions of prospective teachers on the teaching practicum experience in school experience courses.

### **2.2 Research Approach and Participants**

Single case study approach was employed in this study to report on the experiences and perceptions of prospective teachers based on detailed documentation. Although the research approach is single case approach as it is the limitation of this study, the detailed documentation, report on inductive process yields valuable examination, exploration (Yin, 1994). Sixty five prospective teachers from Classroom Teacher Education and History Teacher Education programmes in one of the higher education institution became part of the qualitative research who enrol school experience course. The purposive sampling strategy was implemented.

### **2.3 Data Collection Technique and Analysis**

Training was done to prospective teachers that teaching practicum and its components were explained for forty five minutes. Then, self-report was employed to collect in-depth reflections, experiences of prospective teachers. Conceptual analysis was done to set themes based on classification and verification (Altinay, Paraskevas, 2008).

## **3. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The research findings provides experiences and perceptions on develop field knowledge, plan and preparation, teaching methods and techniques, communication, classroom management, evaluation, professionalism within the frame of teaching practicum. As prospective teachers agreed that training session as part of the course has vital process for the teaching profession, they highlighted that teaching practice in schools and during the courses help them develop field knowledge, plan and preparation, teaching methods and techniques, communication, classroom management, evaluation, professionalism. Further to this, prospective teachers underlined that preparing a portfolio for teaching practicum provide developing self-determination, observation and reflection skills.

### *Field knowledge*

Field knowledge is the significant component of teaching practicum. Almost all prospective teachers (N=54) reported that school experience courses foster developing field knowledge. In this respect, prospective teachers (N=59) highlighted the contributions of school experience course to the field knowledge in many ways:

‘Teaching practice and school experience course help us enhance field knowledge and be aware of other disciplines’

‘School experience course fosters development on field knowledge and help internalize teaching practice’

‘School experience course provides confidence of field knowledge to transfer real life experience’

‘School experience course is the bridge between theory and practice to do self-evaluation of teaching performance and field knowledge’

### *Plan and Program*

In addition to field knowledge, preparation to the teaching practice, being well prepared to the teaching practicum is the crucial process on teaching profession. Significantly, it is the base line for further steps. Prospective teachers agreed that preparation to the teaching practicum is the prerequisite for the success in teaching profession. Almost all prospective teachers highlighted that plan and program is difficult part of the teaching practicum. However, it is ground for effective instruction.

### *Teaching Methods and Techniques*

The way of teaching and the internalizing principles of teaching methods, techniques are the critical success factors for the teaching profession. Within the teaching practice process, implementing theory into practice can be succeed if prospective teachers can internalize the right choice of the teaching methods and techniques. Almost all prospective teachers reported that school experience course provides in dense experience to evaluate using the appropriate teaching methods and techniques. Significantly, prospective teachers remarked that videotaped simulated instruction within teaching practice and drama, role playing method in micro-teaching help them have in-depth internalization and real life experience about the advantages and disadvantages of contemporary methods and technique for further profession life.

### *Communication*

The personal abilities and skills in teaching profession is the also significant component. According to other components, almost all prospective teachers reported that school experience course enhance their communication, empathy skills. Significantly, all prospective teachers highlighted that communication component is the most developed skill during the school experience course.

### *Classroom management*

For effective teaching and learning process, classroom management is the critical component for teaching profession. When prospective teachers evaluate classroom management, they reported that they gained insights how to manage attention of students, how to arrange classroom atmosphere.

### *Evaluation*

Prospective teachers made reflection on the evaluation that they have learned to summarize the learning of students through exercises and activities at the end of the courses. Most of them stressed the importance of evaluation for transferring knowledge in to new knowledge.

### *Professional Development*

Professional development is the outcome and success of the effective teaching practicum. Almost all participants agreed that school experience course and teaching practicum help them enhance collegial activities and peer support thereby they enhance profession. Prospective teachers stated their perceptions on professional development in many ways:

*"It is ongoing activity"*

*"This course help us experience peer support and development"*

*"Life long learning is together with professional development"*

*"Active learning and experiential learning through observation and reflection support professional development"*

*"Reflection is crucial for professional development"*

*"School experience courses is the first step for professional development"*

*"Portfolio is beneficial for learning and development"*

*"Observing other works provides evidence of development"*

*"Looking in different angles helps develop professionalism"*

*"Micro teaching supports professional development"*

In this respect, prospective teachers became consciousness on professional development while learning and teaching through school experiences courses.

#### *Self-determination, Observation and Reflection Skills*

Reflective portfolio, teaching practicum process helps prospective teachers develop self-determination, observation and reflection skills. As the self-determination, observation and reflection skills are crucial for the outcome of academic programme regarding to European University Association standards, the experience and reflection of the prospective teachers highlighted how this specific course reached out this success.

Self-determination competence of prospective teachers was developed through reflective portfolio and teaching practicum that prospective teachers stated as following:

*"I gained to prioritizes actions for observations and reflection"*

*"I managed huge of knowledge"*

*"I control myself not be anxiety in teaching practicum"*

*"We are in knowledge management, this course help me to manage knowledge and my learning"*

Further to this, observation skills of prospective teachers are developed that they stated in many ways:

*"I learned how to see and look in detail"*

*"Gaining different views and looking in different angles"*

*"I learned to compare different activities"*

*"The way of looking is changed through observation"*

In addition, reflection skills of prospective teachers were developed in the teaching practicum. Prospective teachers developed their reflection skills through portfolio and teaching practicum. They reported that they gained knowledge how to be reflective.

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Reflective practice is a social interchange of experiences from the practices. Student teachers' professional tasks in observations and teaching practices, reflection is a bridge that is a way of expanding social, cultural and political views through way of acting and thinking. Teacher reflection is a key for developing professional knowledge that is supported from observation skills and teaching practices. It is

essential to have meaning making process within intellectual and personal growth (Husu, Toom, Patrikainen, 2008; Kleinberg, Stark 1998, Zhu, 2011).

In this research study, it can be seen that prospective teachers developed skills of self-determination, observation and reflection through teaching practicum. They reported that reflective portfolio, teaching practicum support their professional development from school experiences course. In addition, they experience inductive process in order to manage knowledge and they have been the roots of action learning and experiential learning in order to reconstruct knowledge. Further to this, the study remarked that school experience course and real life experience with teaching practicum provide self-determination, observation and reflection skills as they are the transferable skills to the profession. According to the framework of European University Association (EUA) and Bologna process, program and courses need to provide transferable skills for the graduates in order to make them well prepared to the work life. Based on this statement, this study confirmed the skills development process of the prospective teachers for the future real life experience regarding the EUA standards. In addition, the reflective portfolio become effective assessment strategy and progress report as part of the internal quality assurance in higher education programme (Aksal A., Gazi A., De Rossi, V., 2012).

In further studies, mixed approach can be conducted in order to evaluate self determination of prospective teachers in knowledge management. Further to this, multi method can be conducted to evaluate deepen perceptions of prospective teachers.

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